

When can I begin to allow my child to stay home alone?

Deciding when to leave your child by themselves can be a nerve racking decision for parents. There is no set age dictated by law, thus making this choice a judgment call. Fortunately, there are some guidelines to consider as well as things to do in preparation. Parents will need to consider whether their child is responsible and if they feel comfortable by themselves. Their maturity level will also need to be considered when making this choice. You may want to begin allowing your child to stay home for short, infrequent amounts of time to assure that your child is ready for this privilege. Children under the age of ten should not be without supervision.

Children should know their full name, phone number, and address as well as emergency contact information and how you can be reached if needed. Educate your child about how to remain safe when without you. This may include not answering the door and how to exit the home in case of a fire. Be clear about the rules while you are away and structure what your child will be doing. Talk about any restrictions you may have including rules about friends in the home and whether they can cook without supervision. Consider your child's accessibility to dangerous items such as matches, alcohol, or guns.

Parents should encourage their children to check in frequently and voice any safety concerns they have about being by themselves. If you or your child have doubts, it's best to make other arrangements with a neighbor, another parent, or after-school program.